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ABSTRACT

This report provides information on the content of school lunches offered to middle school children in the public schools. A total of 163 middle schools in 42 states responded to the school lunch survey. Survey findings are given on: (1) the contents of the main course, vegetable and fruit offerings, desserts, and beverages; and (2) lunches actually eaten by students including those prepared outside of the school lunch program. It is concluded that from the main course to dessert, options in the school lunch program are often high in fat. Contributing to this high-fat diet is the lack of variety in school lunch menus. Recommendations are made for state and federal action. (JD)

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WHAT'S FOR LUNCH? II
A 1990 SURVEY OF OPTIONS IN THE School LUNCH PROGRAM

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What's for Lunch? II
A 1990 Survey of Options in the School Lunch Program

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The National School Lunch Program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, has successfully ensured that school lunches provide one-third of the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs) to children. But currently it has no limitations on fat levels despite solid scientific evidence linking high fat consumption to heart disease and certain cancers. Studies also indicate that diets high in fat during childhood increase the risk of heart disease later in life.

There is broad consensus among health professionals that all Americans, including children age two and older, keep their fat intake to 30 percent of all calories consumed. Yet children continue to maintain diets high in fat. A national survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that 6-19 year olds obtain nearly 37 percent of their daily calories from fat — substantially above the recommended 30 percent.

Public Voice for Food and Health Policy conducted an analysis of school lunch programs to assess the low-fat options children have for lunches in their schools. The analysis, based on a survey printed in Current Science magazine, also examined whether the lunches children actually eat are low in fat. Current Science, a publication written specifically for schoolchildren, sought to identify the foods offered most frequently in the school lunch program and the foods school age children chose to eat.

The following report is just a glimpse at the lunches being served — and eaten — in school. While it is by no means a statistically representative sample of school

lunch programs, the numbers are large enough to illustrate a clear pattern. Too much fat is being offered our children in school lunches.

A total of 163 middle schools in 42 states responded to the school lunch survey. The majority of lunches were from school lunch menus. Therefore, what students are opting to eat is primarily affected by what school lunch programs are offering. (During the week of the survey, 58 percent of the lunches were provided by the school lunch program, 32 percent were provided from home and 9 percent were provided from elsewhere.)

Key Findings

Middle School Lunch Programs

From the main course to dessert, options in the school lunch program are often high in fat. Of the 163 schools surveyed, a meal of a cheeseburger or pizza, french fries, canned fruit and cakes or cookies is typical of what students are offered in school lunch programs. Lower-fat options, such as baked chicken, baked potatoes, and frozen yogurt are served, but not as frequently — and not in as great quantity — as higher-fat foods.

Contributing to this high-fat diet is the lack of variety in school lunch menus. In nearly two-thirds of the schools surveyed, only one or two main courses was offered, and over half of those schools offered only one main course, generally high in fat. Nearly half the schools offered the USDA minimum of only two fruits and/or vegetables.

Although Americans have changed their eating habits considerably over the last decade — opting for more nutritious and healthy foods — school lunch menus are still of the old, traditionally high-fat variety.

A conclusion can be drawn: fewer low-fat options for students mean fewer low-fat choices by students.

MAIN COURSE

94 percent of the schools surveyed offered at least one hot and often high in fat main course:

- 37.4 percent offered hamburgers/cheeseburgers;
- 25.2 percent offered pizza;
- 22.1 percent offered pasta;
- 19.6 percent offered hot dogs, and
- 19.0 percent offered fried chicken.

In addition, three times as many schools offered fried chicken in comparison to the lower fat alternative, baked chicken.

VEGETABLES

- 81.6 percent of the schools offered a garden salad;
- 48.5 percent offered potatoes;
  - — 73.9 percent fried potatoes;
  - — 20.5 percent mashed;
  - — 5.7 percent baked.

The latter two options are considerably lower in fat than fried potatoes.

FRUIT

- 58.5 percent of the schools offered canned fruit;
- 37.1 percent offered fresh fruit.

Canned fruit tends to contain added sugar, unlike fresh fruit.

DESSERT

- 50.9 percent offered cake;
- 33.7 percent offered cookies.

BEVERAGES

- One-hundred percent of the schools offered milk, as is required by the school lunch program;
- 37.4 percent offered fruit juice;
- 9.2 percent offered fruit drink (added sugar);
- 8.6 percent offered soda.

Lunches Eaten by Middle School Students (including those not provided by school lunch programs)

Although the lunches actually eaten by students included those prepared outside of the school lunch program, they were similar in pattern to what schools offered, since the majority of students eat from school lunch menus. The same high-fat options are evident. Pizza, hamburgers and fried chicken dominate the main course options, and french fries, canned fruits packed in sugar-syrup and cakes and cookies most often complete the high-fat meal.

MAIN COURSE

Of the 6,226 main courses eaten during the day of the survey, 70.2 percent were hot dishes and high in fat:

- 22.9 percent ate pizza;
- 15.5 percent ate pasta;
- 14.5 percent ate hamburgers/cheeseburgers;
- 12.1 percent ate fried chicken/fried fish;
- 9.1 percent ate hot dogs.

VEGETABLES

Of the 4,735 vegetables consumed:

- 35.5 percent ate green salads;
- 30.3 percent ate potatoes:
  - — 68.2 percent ate fried;
  - — 26.1 percent ate mashed, and
  - — 5.7 percent ate percent baked.

Only 3.3 percent of the vegetables eaten were rice or baked beans, lower-fat options.

FRUIT

Of the 2,154 fruits eaten:

- 61.4 percent ate canned;
- 36.1 percent ate fresh.

DESSERT

Of the 4,552 desserts eaten:

- 27.8 percent ate cake;
- 27.0 percent ate cookies;
- 6.0 percent ate gelatin;
- 1.2 percent ate yogurt.

More than half of the desserts eaten that day were high in fat.

BEVERAGES

Of the 6,623 beverages consumed:

- Nearly three-fourths chose milk:
  - — 24.0 percent drank low fat chocolate milk;
  - — 22.6 percent drank low fat plain milk;

  - 16.4 percent drank whole chocolate milk;
  - 6.4 percent drank whole white milk, and
  - 3.7 percent drank skim milk.
- 16.4 percent drank fruit drinks;
- 7.2 percent drank soda;
- 1.4 percent drank punches.

Key Recommendations

- Congress should mandate the U.S. Department of Agriculture to require that school lunch programs limit the fat content of lunches to 30 percent of total calories consumed.

- In their future publication, Nutrition Guidelines for Child Nutrition Programs, due to be published in November 1991, USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services should require that school lunches derive no more than 30% of calories from fat.

- Until there is a federal mandate, state legislatures around the country should follow California's lead and pass legislation establishing guidelines to limit the fat content of school lunches.

- USDA should significantly expand the availability of lower-fat commodities to the schools. The school lunch programs depend upon the free commodities provided by USDA to maintain economic viability, and the high proportion of high-fat foods acts to thwart efforts by directors to reduce fat.

- Congress should appropriate the increased funding to the Nutrition Education and Training (NET) Program as authorized by the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 1989. Nutrition education of our students is critical to support the efforts of school lunch directors in lowering fat.

INTRODUCTION

For over 40 years, the National School Lunch Program has provided meals to millions of school age children. Created after World War II to help an undernourished population, the program has successfully ensured that children receive one-third of the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs) through school lunches. The RDAs are nutrient levels which were established to meet the essential nutritional needs of healthy Americans.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture translates these nutritional needs into specific food groups and mandates school lunch providers to include them in their meals. A school lunch meal must provide: one serving of a meat or meat alternate; two or more servings of vegetables and/or fruits; one serving of whole grain, enriched bread or bread alternate; and milk.

Currently the program does not limit the amount of fat in school lunches, despite solid scientific evidence linking high fat consumption to heart disease and certain cancers. In 1989, the Surgeon General issued a 712 page report concluding that high fat consumption is the number one problem in the American diet. In particular, heart disease strikes significantly more Afro-American males and females 64 years and younger than their white counterparts. Low income groups suffer disproportionately high rates of hypertension and obesity, two health concerns closely associated with heart disease.

There is strong evidence that high fat diets in childhood increase the likelihood of heart disease later in life. For example, The Muscatine Study, conducted jointly by the Department of Pediatrics and the Department of Preventative Medicine at the University of Iowa, found that elevated childhood cholesterol levels are strongly associated with

abnormally high levels in adulthood. The Bolgalusa Heart Study observed a similarly strong correlation between childhood and adult cholesterol levels.

Despite these health warnings, children continue to eat foods high in fat. The most recent National Health and Examination Survey showed that 6-19 year olds obtain nearly 37 percent of their daily calories from fat — substantially above the recommended 30 percent. Over 13 percent of their total daily calories comes from saturated fat, which should comprise less than 10 percent of total calorie intake. Furthermore, children consume meats high in fat and cholesterol, such as beef, hot dogs and hamburgers more frequently than the lower fat alternatives, chicken, turkey or fish.

Studies also indicate that the traditional snack foods — pretzels, potato chips, soft drinks, candy, cake, and ice cream, contribute as much as one-third of calories and fat to children's diets and do not meet the dietary guidelines recommending that Americans avoid too much fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sugar, and sodium.

Clearly, children need to reduce fat in their diets. There is broad agreement among health professionals that all Americans — including children age two and above — reduce fat intake to 30 percent of total calories. This includes recommendations from the National Academy of Sciences; the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; the American Heart Association; and the American Cancer Society.

Reducing children's fat intake and educating them about a healthy, nutritious diet can begin with the school lunch program. Over 60 percent of school children participate in the program — almost half are poor children for whom the nutrition provided in school lunches is particularly critical. The American Health Foundation has shown that a school-based program of nutrition education coupled with a lower fat diet can reduce children's cholesterol. A positive pattern established early in school can nurture lifelong healthy eating habits.

Public Voice for Food and Health Policy conducted an analysis of a survey in Current Science magazine, asking students what was served for lunch on a given day, and what they actually ate. Based on an analysis of data and a review of policy options, Public Voice developed recommendations for reducing fat in school lunch programs. Current Science is a publication designed for school age children. A total of 163 middle schools in 41 states responded to their survey.

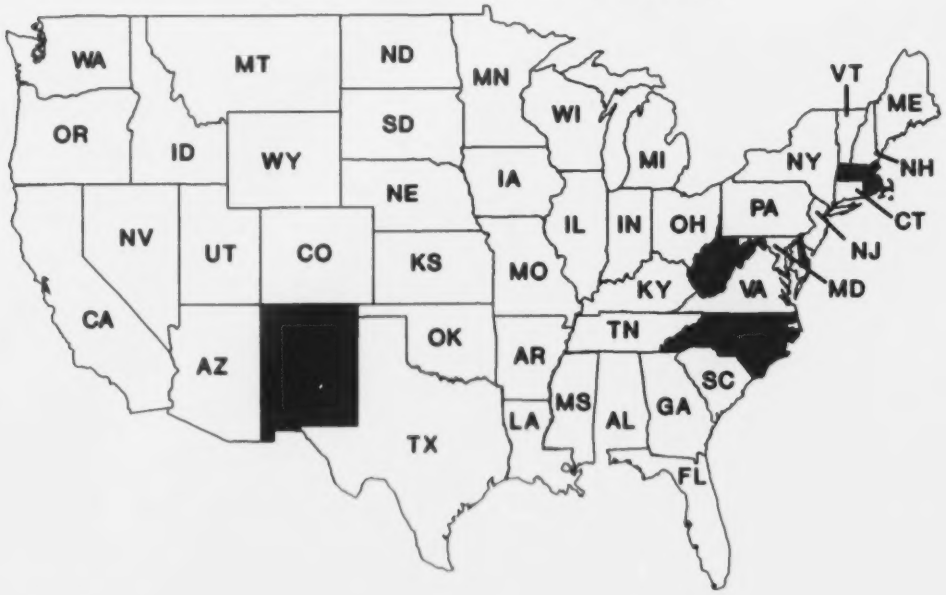
The following report is just a glimpse at the lunches being served — and eaten — in school. While it is by no means a statistically representative sample of school lunch programs, the numbers are large enough to illustrate a clear pattern. Too much fat is being offered our children in school lunches.

SURVEY RESULTS

The result section is divided into two parts. The first part describes the meals offered in school lunches and the second details the lunches eaten by middle school children.

A total of 163 middle schools correctly completed and sent back the survey forms (see methods for details). The geographical representation includes schools in each of USDA's seven regions. A total of 42 states had at least one school included in the study (see Diagram 1).

Diagram 1: States Participating in Survey



Of the children surveyed, a total of 6,226 main courses; 4,739 vegetables; 2,154 fruits; 6,631 beverages; and 4,552 desserts were reported to be eaten on the day the survey was conducted. It should not be assumed that the number of meals eaten represents the number of children surveyed. Many children ate more than one food item within a category; i.e. children may have eaten two hamburgers or two sandwiches.

Lunches Offered in Middle Schools

This part describes the meals offered in middle school lunch programs. In particular it identifies the most frequently offered main courses, vegetables, fruits, beverages and desserts. Lunches offered represent what programs make available to children eating school lunches, it does not reflect what children actually eat.

Main Course Selections

Hot main course items that are high in fat are most frequently offered in middle school lunch programs (see Table 1). Of the 163 middle schools responding to the survey, almost all (93.9%) offered at least one hot main course. Of these schools, more than one-third (37.4%) offered hamburgers or cheeseburgers. In addition, hot dogs and fried chicken were other high fat items among the five most frequently served hot main courses. The remaining two most frequently served main courses, pizza and pasta dishes, can also be high in fat depending on the amount of cheese and meats included. Almost three times as many schools offered fried chicken in comparison to the lower fat alternative, baked chicken.

Table 1: Hot Main Courses Offered

Main Course Offerings	Number of Schools	Percent of Schools
Hamburger/Cheeseburger	61	37.4%
Pizza	41	25.2%
Pasta (meat/cheese)	36	22.1%
Hotdog	32	19.6%
Fried Chicken/Fish	31	19.0%
Taco/Burrito	23	14.1%
Steak Slices	13	8.0%
Baked Chicken	11	6.7%
Grilled Cheese Sandwich	7	4.3%
Pork Chop	2	1.2%
Other	18	11.0%

Note: Total percent of schools is greater than 100 because many schools offered more than one main course item

Cold sandwiches were offered in about half (49.1%) of the middle schools. Of these schools, meat, cheese and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches were most frequently offered.

Vegetable Selections

Green salads and fried potatoes were the most frequently offered vegetables in middle school lunch programs (see Table 2). About four out of five schools (81.6%) served a garden salad and nearly half (48.5%) served potatoes.

Table 2: Vegetables Offered

Vegetables	Number of Schools	Percent of Schools
Green Salad	133	81.6%
Potatoes	79	48.5%
Green Beans	32	19.6%
Corn	26	16.0%
Peas	19	11.7%
Mixed Vegetables	18	11.0%
Carrots	14	8.6%
Baked Beans	10	6.1%
Rice	5	3.1%
Broccoli	4	2.5%
Spinach	3	1.8%
Other	33	20.2%

Note: Percent of schools is greater than 100 because many schools offered more than one vegetable item

Of the schools offering potatoes, 73.9 percent offered fried potatoes, while the lower fat alternatives, mashed and baked potatoes, were offered in only 20.5 percent and 5.7 percent of the schools respectively (see Table 3).

Table 3: Potatoes Offered

Potatoes Offered	Number of Schools	Percent of Schools
Fried	65	73.9%
Mashed	18	20.5%
Baked	5	5.7%

Dark green leafy vegetables, high in folate and vitamin B6, were extremely limited in school lunches. Only 2.5 percent and 1.8 percent of the schools offered broccoli and spinach respectively, vegetables high in these two nutrients. The vegetables most frequently offered were high in vitamin A and/ vitamin C (see Table 2).

Fruit Selections

Unlike vegetables, all school lunch programs did not offer fruit. In fact, nearly one-quarter of the middle schools surveyed (24.4%) offered no fruit at all. Of the schools serving fruit, canned fruit was offered in 58.5 percent of the schools, while 37.1 percent offered fresh fruit. Canned fruit tends to contain added sugar, unlike fresh fruit (see Table 4).

Table 4: Fruits Offered

Fruits Offered	Number of Schools	Percent of Schools
Canned Fruit	93	58.5%
Fresh Fruit	59	37.1%
Applesauce	7	4.4%

Beverage Selections

In addition to offering milk, which is required of school lunch programs, more than one-third (37.4%) offered fruit juices (see Table 5). Rarely were soda or fruit drinks served.

Table 5: Beverages Offered

Beverage	Number of Schools	Percent of Schools
Milk	163	100.0%
Fruit Juice	61	37.4%
Fruit Drink	15	9.2%
Soda	14	8.6%
Other	12	7.4%

Note: Percent of schools is greater than 100 because many schools offered more than one beverage item

Dessert Selections

Cake and cookies, which tend to be high in calories, sugar and fat were the most frequently offered desserts in middle school lunch programs (see Table 6). Approximately half of the schools served cake (50.9%) and one-third (33.7%) served cookies.

Table 6: Desserts Offered

Dessert	Number of Schools	Percent of Schools
Cake	83	50.9%
Cookies	55	33.7%
Ice Cream	34	20.9%
Pudding	30	18.4%
Pie	20	12.3%
Gelatin	20	12.3%
Yogurt	17	10.4%
Candy	17	10.4%
Other	10	6.1%

Note: Total percent of schools is greater than 100 because many schools offered more than one dessert item

Choices Within Middle Schools

The selection of food items served in the majority of middle school lunch programs is limited. Nearly two-thirds of the middle schools (63.8%) served only one or two main course dishes the day of the survey (see Table 7). Of these, nearly three-fifths (58.7%) served only one main course.

Table 7: Number of Main Courses Offered in School Lunch Programs

Number of Hot Meals	Number of Cold Meals	Total Number of Main Courses	Number of Schools	Percent of Schools
1	0	1	55	33.7%
0	1	1	6	3.7%
2	0	2	21	12.9%
1	1	2	20	12.3%
0	2	2	2	1.2%
2	1	3	7	4.3%
3	0	3	5	3.1%
1	2	3	5	3.1%
0	3	3	1	0.6%
3	1	4	7	4.3%
2	2	4	5	3.1%
1	3	4	3	1.8%
4	0	4	1	0.6%
>4 main courses offered			25	15.3%

In schools serving only one main course, 90.1 percent served a hot dish. In these schools, the main courses tended to be high in fat. Pizza, hamburger/cheeseburger, fried chicken, pasta and hot dogs were among the six most frequently served dishes (see Table 8).

Table 8: Hot Main Courses Offered in Schools with One Entree

Main Course	Number of Schools	Percent of Schools
Pizza	12	22.3%
Hamburger	8	14.9%
Fried Chicken	8	14.9%
Taco	6	11.1%
Pasta	6	11.1%
Hot Dog	4	7.4%
Baked Chicken	3	3.7%
Grilled Cheese	2	3.7%
Beef	2	3.7%
Fried Fish	1	1.9%
Ham Potpie	1	1.9%
Other	1	1.9%

Like main courses, the selection of vegetables and fruits is limited. Nearly half of the schools (44.8%) only offered the minimum number of two vegetables and/or fruits required by the program on the day of the survey (see Table 9).

Table 9: Number of Vegetables & Fruits Offered

Number of Vegetables or Fruits	Number of Schools	Percent of Schools
2	73	44.8%
3	41	25.2%
4	18	11.0%
>4	31	19.0%

Lunches Eaten by Middle School Children

This part describes the lunches middle school children ate on school days. Specifically, it identifies the main courses, vegetables, fruits, beverages, and desserts actually eaten by fifth through eighth graders for lunch during the school week. Lunches reported by children were prepared at school, at home, or at a place outside of school. During the week of the survey, students reported eating 58 percent of lunches provided by the school lunch program, 32 percent from home and 9 percent elsewhere.

Main Courses Eaten

Fifth through eighth graders most frequently ate hot main courses at lunchtime during the school week. Of the 6,226 main course items reported to be consumed on the day of the survey, 70.2 percent were hot dishes. Of these, pizza was the number one choice (see Table 10). Pasta, hamburgers/cheeseburgers and fried chicken, were the other top main courses eaten by fifth through eighth graders.

Table 10: Hot Main Courses Eaten

Hot Main Courses Eaten	Number of Servings Eaten	Percent of Total Servings
Pizza	1001	22.9%
Pasta (meat/cheese)	676	15.5%
Hamburger/Cheeseburger	635	14.5%
Fried Chicken/Fried Fish	530	12.1%
Hotdog	397	9.1%
Taco/Burrito	328	7.5%
Baked Chicken	226	5.2%
Steak Slices	139	3.2%
Grilled Cheese Sandwich	106	2.4%
Pork Chop	62	1.4%
Other	272	6.2%

Less than one-third of the main courses eaten (29.8%) were cold sandwiches. Of these items, meat, cheese and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches were most frequently consumed. The two other cold sandwiches reportedly eaten were consumed substantially less than the other items. Only 7 percent and 1 percent of the sandwiches eaten were tunafish and egg salad respectively.

Vegetables Eaten

Fried potatoes and green salads were the vegetables most frequently eaten for weekday lunches by middle school children (see Table 11). Of the vegetables eaten, 35.5 percent were potatoes and 30.3 percent were green salads.

Table 11: Vegetables Eaten

Vegetables Eaten	Number of Servings Eaten	Percent of Total Servings
Potatoes	1681	35.5%
Green Salad	1433	30.3%
Green Beans	389	8.2%
Corn	333	7.0%
Mixed Vegetables	139	2.9%
Rice	111	2.3%
Carrots	100	2.1%
Peas	96	2.0%
Baked Beans	46	1.0%
Broccoli	15	0.3%
Spinach	4	0.1%
Other	392	8.3%

Of the potatoes eaten, more than two-thirds (68.2%) were fried potatoes, while the lower fat items, mashed and baked were eaten 26.1 percent and 5.7 percent respectively (see Table 12). Only 3.3 percent of the vegetables eaten were rice and baked beans.

Table 12: Potatoes Eaten

Potatoes	Number of Servings Eaten	Percent of Total Servings
Fried	1147	68.2%
Mashed	439	26.1%
Baked	95	5.7%

Broccoli was only reported to be eaten in 0.3 percent of all vegetables consumed. Broccoli is a good source of folate and vitamin B6. Most vegetables consumed were good sources of vitamin A and/or C.

Fruits Eaten

During the school week, almost twice as many fruits consumed by fifth through eighth graders were canned in comparison to fresh (see Table 13). Of the 2,154 fruits consumed, nearly two-thirds (61.4%) were canned and about one-third (36.1%) were fresh.

Table 13: Fruits Eaten

Fruits	Number of Servings Eaten	Percent of Total Servings
Canned	1323	61.4%
Fresh	777	36.1%
Applesauce	54	2.5%

Beverages Consumed

Nearly three-fourths (73.1%) of the beverages consumed by middle school children at lunchtime was milk. Of the milk consumed, low fat chocolate and low fat plain were the most frequently drunk (see Table 14). Whole milk and low fat were the least often consumed.

The non-milk beverages were reported to be consumed substantially less often than milk. Only 15.6 percent of all beverages were fruit juices, 7.2 percent sodas, and 1.4 percent fruit drinks.

Table 14: Beverages Consumed

Beverages Consumed	Number of Servings Consumed	Percent of Total Servings
Lowfat Chocolate Milk	1591	24.0%
Lowfat Milk	1497	22.6%
Whole Chocolate Milk	1083	16.4%
Fruit Juice	1030	15.6%
Soda	480	7.2%
Whole Milk	427	6.4%
Skim Milk	247	3.7%
Fruit Drink	90	1.4%
Vegetable Juices	8	0.1%
Other	178	2.7%

Desserts Eaten

During the school week, cakes and cookies were the most frequently eaten desserts by fifth through eighth graders (see Table 15). More than half (54.8%) of all desserts eaten were either cakes (27.8%) or cookies (27.0%). The lower fat desserts, such as yogurt and gelatin were least often consumed.

Table 15: Desserts Eaten

Desserts Eaten	Number of Servings Eaten	Percent of Total Servings
Cake	1266	27.8%
Cookies	1228	27.0%
Ice Cream	618	13.6%
Candy	417	9.2%
Pudding	293	6.4%
Gelatin	268	5.9%
Pie	255	5.6%
Yogurt	56	1.2%
Other	151	3.3%

THE NEED FOR GREATER USDA LEADERSHIP

It is incumbent upon the USDA, the administrators of the National School Lunch Program, to limit school lunches to 30% of calories from fat, and to provide leadership and guidance to school lunch directors struggling to make their lunches more nutritious. According to Public Voice's 1989 survey of school food service directors, over 80 percent agreed that fat should be reduced in school lunches.

Acknowledging the importance of reducing fat in school lunches, USDA has undertaken several positive steps which include:

- Grants awarded by USDA for pilot projects in five school districts, the largest of which are Denver, CO, and San Bernadino, CA, to seek innovative approaches to lowering fat content in their school lunches, while maintaining high acceptability among school children.

- USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services meetings with members of the medical and nutrition communities to discuss ways that changes in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans might be implemented in the school lunch program. This effort is in response to legislation passed in 1989 requiring the two departments to produce a publication within two years offering guidance on nutrition for children.

- Lowering maximum fat content levels in certain commodities: the maximum fat content of ground beef was lowered to 24% (with an actual average of 21%), and in canned pork from 21% to 18%.

However, despite these steps forward, a number of serious problems remain:

- USDA does not require schools to reduce the fat in school lunches to 30 percent of calories.

▸ USDA has fallen far short of providing a comprehensive program for school food service directors, which would provide them with the information, training, and resources they need to reduce fat to recommended levels.

▸ USDA commodity policies actually thwart attempts to reduce fat. In an effort to help farmers reduce surpluses and stabilize prices, USDA purchases certain food items and donates them to schools. School food service directors depend upon these commodities to keep their programs financially sound. About 20 percent of each school meal consists of these commodity foods. Yet the commodities offered to schools include a high proportion of foods that contain high levels of fat.

During the 1989-90 school year, USDA provided schools with $491.7 million in entitlement commodities and $325.3 million in bonus commodities. The 935.6 million pounds of entitlement foods consisted of 22% grain products, 20% fruits, 18% beef, fish and other meat, 17% vegetables (including french fries), 12% poultry, 7% polyunsaturated vegetable oils, 2% dairy products, and 2% peanut products.

However, when looking at the dollar value, almost 50% of the entitlement commodities and nearly 90% of the bonus commodities consist of high fat ground meat and luncheon meat, dairy products and vegetable oil, all of which contribute to the high fat content of school lunches.

A closer examination of the types of commodities reveals that many of the fruits and vegetables are canned, meaning they contain large amounts of sugar and/or salt. Additionally, almost 60% of the vegetables consists of fried potatoes (potato rounds, oven fried potatoes, and deep fried potatoes), which are high in fat. Fresh vegetables are not even on the list of commodities, and the only fresh fruits offered are apples and pears. The meats available are mainly high fat ground meat and luncheon meat.

School Year 1990 Commodities

Meats
Beef, Frozen Ground
Beef, Frozen, Ground, Coarse
Beef Patties, Frozen with Vegetable Protein Product
Beef Patties, Frozen
Beef, Canned
Meat, Luncheon Canned
Pork, Canned
Pork, Frozen, Ground
Pork, Frozen, Ground, Coarse
Ham, Frozen Cooked Boneless
Tuna, Chunk Light-Water
Tuna, 66.5
Fish Nuggets, Frozen
Beans, Dry
Chickens, Frozen, Quarters
Chickens, Frozen, Cut-up
Chickens, Frozen, Breaded
Chickens, Chilled, Bulk
Turkey, Frozen, Whole
Turkey, Chilled, Bulk
Turkey Roasts, Frozen
Turkey, Frozen, Ground

Vegetables
Beans, Green, Canned
Beans, Green, Frozen
Beans, Vegetarian
Beans, Refried, Canned
Corn, Canned Vacuum
Corn, Canned Liquid
Peas, Green, Canned
Potato Rounds, Frozen
Potatoes, Oven Fry
Potatoes, Deep Fry
Sweet Potatoes, Syrup
Sweet Potatoes, Mashed
Tomatoes, Crushed
Tomato Paste, Canned
Tomatoes, Canned

Dairy
Cheese, Process
Cheese, Cheddar
Cheese, Mozzarella Unfrozen
Cheese, Mozzarella Frozen
Eggs, Whole, Frozen

Fat
Oil, Vegetable
Oil, Soybean
Shortening, Liquid Veg
Shortening, Vegetable
Spaghetti, Enriched

Fruits
Apples, Fresh
Apple Juice, Canned
Apple Slices, Canned
Apple Sauce, Canned
Apricots, Canned
Cherries, Frozen
Blueberries, Frozen
Raspberries, Red Frozen
Peaches, Cling Canned
Peaches, Freestone Canned
Peaches, Frozen, Sliced
Pears, Canned
Pears, Halves
Pears, Sliced
Pears, Diced
Pears, D'Anjou Fresh
Pears, Bosc Fresh
Pineapple, Canned
Plums, Canned, Purple
Plums, Canned, Pitted
Mixed Fruit
Prunes, Dried, Pitted

Grain
Flour
Grits, Corn
Macaroni
Oats, Rolled
Peanut Butter
Peanut Granules
Peanuts, Roasted
Rice, Milled
Rice, Brown
Wheat, Rolled

These products, which are purchased through the commodity program, often do not meet the nutritional needs of school children. The large percentage of dollars spent on high fat commodities could be better allocated to lower fat, nutrient-dense foods.

FEDERAL LEGISLATION

On November 10, 1989, the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 1989 was enacted. This legislation includes preliminary efforts to reduce fat in the school lunch program. However, it also eliminates skim milk as an alternate to low fat milk.

The legislation requires that within two years of enactment (November 1991), the Secretaries of Agriculture and Health and Human Services develop a publication, Nutrition Guidelines for Child Nutrition Programs, to give schools participating in the National School Lunch Program basic guidance on preparing meals that are nutritionally appropriate for children. This should assist schools in providing children with meals that fit more appropriately with current dietary recommendations by reducing fat in the meals that are served.

In addition, the Nutrition Education and Training Program (NET) was reauthorized through fiscal 1994 at $10 million in 1990, $15 million in 1991, $20 million in 1992 and $25 million in 1993 and in 1994, reflecting substantial increases over the $5 million set for each year since 1981. Although this funding has been authorized at these increased levels, it has not yet been appropriated, implying these funding levels may not be achieved. Public Voice strongly encourages the appropriation of full funding to this Program, as it will help provide nutrition education for our students, critical in supporting the efforts of school lunch directors in lowering fat.

A major drawback of the legislation is a change in the school lunch meal pattern requiring schools to offer students whole milk and lowfat milk. Previously schools had the option of offering students either skim milk or buttermilk, in place of lowfat milk.

However, schools are now required to offer students lowfat milk as part of the school lunch program. For many schools that cannot afford to offer more than the required choices, this legislation eliminates skim milk, a nutritious lowfat dairy product,

from their school lunch programs. With the strong consensus of the medical and health communities regarding the benefits of a low fat diet, the elimination of skim milk is inconsistent with efforts to reduce the fat content of school lunches.

CALIFORNIA NUTRITION INITIATIVE

California is doing what federal and other state governments have been unable to do — limit the fat content in school lunches. In September of 1989, California became the first state to require nutrition guidelines limiting the amount of fat and cholesterol schools can serve children. The legislation mandates the California State Department of Education to develop nutrition guidelines for all food and beverages sold on public school campuses.

This legislation, sponsored by State Assemblywoman Jackie Speier, provides guidance for schools regarding the overall nutritional quality of foods that are offered to students. Further, where comparable food products of equal nutritional value are available, the law calls upon schools to use the food lower in fat and cholesterol. The goal is to offer a wider variety of healthy food choices to all students and teachers.

California's Daily Food Guide, based on the study The California Daily Food Guide: Dietary Guidance for Californians, is being used as the basis for developing voluntary nutrition guidelines for school meals. The guidelines for schools will be first introduced to the educational environment on a smaller scale and their feasibility and impact tested and documented prior to statewide implementation. Over the next few years, these nutrition guidelines will be integrated into curriculum materials for preschool through grade twelve, and provided to parents and the community.

Approximately 20 California school districts will be field testing the nutrition guidelines and monitoring costs associated with their implementation over the next three years. The field testing will include cost comparison to comparable districts where they have not been implemented. Even if increased costs are incurred, the California State Department of Education has indicated any added expense will be well worth it — since the money is an important investment in the health and well-being of their children.

Integration of the guidelines into education and training of child nutrition personnel, parents, teachers, administrators, and students will form the basis for the coordinated and progressive campaign, "School Nutrition: Shaping Healthy Choices." The campaign is designed to help California schools introduce students to dietary practices that promote health and reduce the risk of chronic disease. This campaign is a vital part of the California State Department of Education's comprehensive health initiative, "Healthy Kids, Healthy California," which also encourages fitness and avoidance of tobacco, drugs, and alcohol.

According to Bill Honig, California's Superintendent of Public Instruction, "We are committed to creating a generation of children who not only like to, but choose to eat healthful food. To accomplish this, the school nutrition campaign will involve students, parents, teachers, and the community. Providing consistent nutrition messages will strengthen the partnership between parents and schools, making it easier for children to develop healthier attitudes about food."

Public Voice congratulates California's initiative and encourages other states to follow its lead. Healthy, nutritious eating habits should start with gradeschool students ensuring that they will carry these habits with them through adulthood.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Congress should mandate the U.S. Department of Agriculture to require that school lunch programs limit the fat content of lunches to 30 percent of total calories consumed.

2. In their future publication, Nutrition Guidelines for Child Nutrition Programs, due to be published in November 1991, USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services should require that school lunches derive no more than 30% of calories from fat.

3. Until there is a federal mandate, state legislatures around the country should follow California's lead and pass legislation establishing guidelines to limit the fat content of school lunches.

4. Until USDA is mandated to limit the fat content, it should provide leadership in educating school food service directors about the critical public health need to reduce fat in school lunches, and the clear consensus on limiting dietary fat to 30 percent of calories for school age children.

5. USDA should translate this consensus into meaningful guidance for school food service directors. In addition to the recipes for reduced-fat items which USDA has provided, the agency should provide assistance in planning monthly menus, suggesting how often specific foods should be served (e.g., hot dogs should be served no more than twice each month). Directors should also be trained in other methods of reducing fat in the lunches, such as working with food suppliers to provide lower-fat alternatives.

6. USDA should significantly expand the availability of lower-fat commodities to the schools. The school lunch programs depend upon the free commodities provided by USDA to maintain economic viability, and the high proportion of high-fat foods acts to thwart efforts by directors to reduce fat.

7. Congress should appropriate the increased funding to the Nutrition Education and Training (NET) Program as authorized by the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 1989. Nutrition education of our students is critical to support the efforts of school lunch directors in lowering fat.

8. Nutrition and low-fat meal-planning materials developed for food service personnel should be more widely distributed. Special effort should be made to disseminate such resources and information to rural areas, where directors now receive far less guidance than their peers in urban areas.

9. School administrators should collaborate with city and state health agencies to identify nutrition priorities and develop strategies to meet the nutrition education needs of the diverse populations within their jurisdictions. This is being done successfully in a number of states, including New York, Minnesota, and Oregon.

10. The food industry should work closely with school food service officials to develop healthy lunch items that will be popular with students. This effort should include a cooperative campaign with school lunch personnel to promote these to the students, and training in their preparation.

11. Parents should get more involved with the school lunch program. They should work for improvements such as more low-fat options, removal of less-nutritious (competitive) foods from vending machines, and nutrition education to supplement the school meals. School food service directors need the support and encouragement of concerned parents if they are to take innovative steps.

SURVEY METHODS

A total of 163 middle schools in 42 states responded to the school lunch survey published in Current Science's February 16, 1990 issue. Within these schools, 6,226 main courses were reported to be eaten by fifth through eighth graders on the day of the survey.

Sample

All schools receiving Current Science magazine were eligible to participate in the study by filling out the survey form included in the issue and sending it back to the magazine. Current Science is a biweekly publication targeted to fifth through ninth graders.

The following report is just a glimpse at the lunches being served — and eaten — in school. While it is by no means a statistically representative sample of school lunch programs, the numbers are large enough to illustrate a clear pattern. Too much fat is being offered our children in school lunches.

Survey Development

The survey was initially developed by the staff at Current Science. It was then reviewed by a nutritionist at Public Voice.

The survey consisted of two sections (see Appendix A). One section examined meals offered in school lunch programs and the other examined lunches actually eaten by children. The first section asked middle school children to check off all food items offered in their cafeteria on the day of the survey. The second section asked children to check off all food items they actually ate on the day of the survey.

Selected food items were grouped into one of the following six categories: appetizer, main course, side dish, sandwich, dessert and beverage. Selected food items included in the survey were based on children's eating preferences. To ensure that children reported all food items, an "other" category was included.

Data Collection

The teacher's edition of Current Science included instructions on how the children should fill out the survey. In addition, teachers were asked to total class answers and send the class totals to Current Science.

Survey forms were received at Current Science from mid-March through the end of May, 1990.

Data Analysis

Current Science editors sent the survey forms to Public Voice in June 1990 for analysis. A total of 222 school surveys were sent. Of these, 18.0 percent were eliminated because classes surveyed were not in the study's target group of fifth through eight graders. An additional 8.6 percent of the schools were eliminated because the survey forms were either too confusing or did not contain adequate information. A total of 163 schools were included in the study.

To determine what schools offered in their lunch programs a detailed analysis was conducted of the number of schools offering specific food items within each of the following categories: main course, vegetable, fruit, beverage and dessert. Frequencies were then computed for each food item based on the number of schools offering a particular food item divided by the total number of schools offering at least one food item within that category. Lunches reported to be eaten included students eating a lunch provided by the school lunch program, from home or elsewhere.

To determine what children actual ate for lunch a detailed analysis was conducted of the number of times children reported eating specific foods within each of the following categories: main course, vegetable, fruit, beverage and dessert. Frequencies were then computed for each food item based on the number of times the food item was reported to be eaten divided by the total number of food items reported to be eaten within that category.

It should not be assumed that the number of meals eaten represents the number of children surveyed. Many children ate more than one food item within a category; i.e. children may have eaten two hamburgers or two sandwiches.

Appendix A

School-Lunch Survey

What Was On Today's Menu in Your Cafeteria?

Appetizer

_____ Soup
_____ Cole Slaw
_____ Salad
_____ Carrot/Celery Sticks

_____ White Bread
_____ Whole Wheat Bread
_____ Crackers
_____ Other _____

Main Course

_____ Hot Dog
_____ Hamburger
_____ Cheeseburger
_____ Grilled Cheese
_____ Fried Chicken
_____ Baked Chicken

_____ Spaghetti
_____ Lasagna
_____ Macaroni & Cheese
_____ Pork Chop
_____ Pizza
_____ Taco
_____ Other _____

Side Dishes

_____ Mixed Vegetables
_____ Carrots
_____ Peas
_____ Spinach
_____ Green Beans
_____ Yellow Beans

_____ Mashed Potatoes
_____ French Fries
_____ Onion Rings
_____ Baked Potato
_____ Potato Chips
_____ Broccoli
_____ Other _____

Sandwich

_____ Fish
_____ Cheese
_____ Peanut Butter & Jam

_____ Cold Meat
_____ Egg
_____ Other _____

Dessert

_____ Cake
_____ Pie
_____ Ice Cream
_____ Yogurt
_____ Cookies
_____ Cupcake
_____ Brownie

_____ Canned Fruit
_____ Fresh Fruit
_____ Pudding
_____ Flavored Gelatin
_____ Candy Bar
_____ Muffin
_____ Other

Beverage

_____ Skim Milk
_____ Low-Fat White Milk
_____ Whole White Milk
_____ Low-Fat Choc. Milk
_____ Choc. Milk

_____ Vegetable Juice
_____ Fruit Juice
_____ Soft Drink
_____ Lemonade
_____ Other _____

What Did You Eat for Lunch Today?

Appetizer

_____ Soup
_____ Cole Slaw
_____ Salad
_____ Carrot/Celery Sticks

_____ White Bread
_____ Whole Wheat Bread
_____ Crackers
_____ Other _____

Main Course

_____ Hot Dog
_____ Hamburger
_____ Cheeseburger
_____ Grilled Cheese
_____ Fried Chicken
_____ Baked Chicken

_____ Spaghetti
_____ Lasagna
_____ Macaroni & Cheese
_____ Pork Chop
_____ Pizza
_____ Taco
_____ Other _____

Side Dishes

_____ Mixed Vegetables
_____ Carrots
_____ Peas
_____ Spinach
_____ Green Beans
_____ Yellow Beans

_____ Mashed Potatoes
_____ French Fries
_____ Onion Rings
_____ Baked Potato
_____ Potato Chips
_____ Broccoli
_____ Other _____

Sandwich

_____ Fish
_____ Cheese
_____ Peanut Butter & Jam

_____ Cold Meat
_____ Egg
_____ Other _____

Dessert

_____ Cake
_____ Pie
_____ Ice Cream
_____ Yogurt
_____ Cookies
_____ Cupcake
_____ Brownie

_____ Canned Fruit
_____ Fresh Fruit
_____ Pudding
_____ Flavored Gelatin
_____ Candy Bar
_____ Muffin
_____ Other

Beverage

_____ Skim Milk
_____ Low-Fat White Milk
_____ Whole White Milk
_____ Low-Fat Choc. Milk
_____ Choc. Milk

_____ Vegetable Juice
_____ Fruit Juice
_____ Soft Drink
_____ Lemonade
_____ Other _____

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